

Drivers pledge good manners

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NORTHAMPTON - To solve the city's traffic problem, Northampton officials are asking motorists to take responsibility for their own driving.

Drivers, whether they work or live in the city, are being asked to become "Northampton Pace Cars" who sign a pledge and put a bright yellow Pace Car sticker on their car.

"The goal is to have enough people participate, enough people driving courteously, enough obeying the speed limit so it calms the tenor of our traffic," Mayor Mary Clare Higgins said yesterday at an announcement of the event.

Higgins and Ward 4 City Councilor David J. Narkewicz, chairman of the Transportation and Parking Commission, were the first to sign the Northampton Pace Car Pledge and to take the Pace Car stickers that Higgins will attach to her Toyota Prius and Narkewicz will put on his mini-van.

Those who sign the pledge promise to drive the speed limit, obey all traffic regulations and to share the road with pedestrians, bicyclists and other drivers. They also promise to walk, bike, ride the bus or share a ride whenever possible.

Higgins proposed the idea of the Pace Car program, which is also used in cities like Boise, Idaho, Honolulu and Santa Cruz, Calif., to the Transportation and Parking Commission in March.

"We do not have enough police officers to patrol the 150 miles of road here in the city. Enforcement alone will not solve our speeding problem. The Pace Car Program is a way to involve a broad group of citizens in the community wide goal of slowing down traffic," Higgins wrote in a letter to the commission.

Narkewicz said he has heard complaints about traffic from residents at many city events.

"I like the concept of individual members of the community being part of a citywide solution," Narkewicz said.

Engineering, enforcement and education are the keys to safe streets, Higgins said.

Already, the city is working on engineering solutions, like installation of sidewalks on Bridge Road and the possible construction of a "roundabout" by Look Park. Police are doing speed enforcement.

"We have not yet done much on education. This is a great educational tool to get people thinking about their own behavior and how they can be a better driver," Higgins said.

More information about the Pace Car Program can be obtained at the city's Web site at www.northamptonma.gov/pacecar. Pledges and stickers can be obtained at the mayor's office, the police department, the parking garage and the public works department.